

Sport Drinks: Do You Need Them?

By Aleida Gordon, MPH, RD and Julie Mortimore, RD

Nurse Alert Newsletter, San Bernardino County Department of Public Health, Child Health and Disability Program

Fall 1999

(Add photo and caption if possible)

Sport drinks continue to be a hot topic of discussion between uncredentialed trainers involved in the “fitness world” and legitimate nutrition professionals. Sports drinks such as Gatorade, Power Ade, and All Sport are advertised as fluid replacements or as thirst quenchers for athletes or fitness minded individuals. The question is-do you need them?

Fluid replacers or thirst quenchers should taste good in order to encourage you to drink more, replace lost fluid, provide energy and help maintain normal blood sugar. They contain a blend of water, sugars, salt, various vitamins, coloring and vegetable oil.

Manufacturers of these products advertise the need to replenish lost sodium and carbohydrates due to physical activity. Electrolyte deficits, such as sodium, occur under more rigorous workouts or conditions than undertaken by the ordinary sports enthusiast, such as ultra endurance events like 50-mile runs or 100- miles bicycle rides. They can also occur when acclimating to a hot environment or following repeated workouts in hot weather. Sport drinks do enhance performance by offering carbohydrate to working muscles. Yet, you need to engage in **exercise at least one hour or longer in order for sports drinks to provide a performance edge that water cannot provide.**

Consequently, the average adult does not need these expensive sport beverages. Water remains an effective and inexpensive fluid replacer to cover losses sustained by the common workout. It is important to get enough fluid, such as water, before, during, and after exercise. Recommendations for adults are at least 8 ounces before exercise, 4-8 ounces every 15-20 minutes during exercise, and 16 ounces after exercise.

References:

1. Coleman, Ellen; Steen, Suzanne. The Ultimate Sports Nutrition Handbook. Palo Alto, California: Bull Publishing Company. 1996

2. "Fitness fiction: Working out the facts." Consumer Reports on Health, October 1996.
3. "Foods, pills, and options: what helps or hurts your workouts?" Consumer Reports on Health, November 1997.